

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8527

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN JOSE 4249

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, CS

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT ODUBER COMMENTS PUBLICLY ON VESCO MATTER

REF: SAN JOSE 4248

1. FOLLOWING ARE OUR COMMENTS ON REFTEL. THE EMBASSY HAS ALREADY RECEIVED ONE INQUIRY ("LA REPUBLICA") ASKING FOR COMMENT ON THE PRESIDENT'S CHARACTERIZATION OF OUR 1973 EXTRADITION ATTEMPT. WE HAVE THUS FAR AVOIDED COMMENT, BUT MORE INQUIRIES ARE INEVITABLE HERE AND PROBABLY IN THE U.S., AND DEPARTMENT'S GUIDANCE IS URGENTLY NEEDED. CLARLY A PUBLIC EMBASSY POSITION IN DIRECT CONTRADICTION TO THE PRESIDENT'S REMARKS IS NOT DESIRABLE, BUT MAY BE JUDGED NECESSARY IN VIEW OF PRESS INTEREST AND HIS DIRECT SUGGESTION THAT THE USG ACTED IN BAD FAITH IN 1973. THIS KIND OF ALLEGATION QUESTIONING THE USG'S MOTIVES IN OUR UNSUCCESSFUL EXTRADITION ATTEMPT IS NOT NEW AS THE DEPARTMENT IS WELL AWARE, BUT THIS IS THE FIRST TIME IT HAS COME PUBLICLY FROM A HIGH OFFICIAL SOURCE. FOR THE USG TO EFFECTIVELY REFUTE THIS ASSERTION IT WOULD NOT BE SUFFICIENT FOR THE EMBASSY PRESS OFFICER TO SAY SIMPLY THAT THE EMBASSY AND THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE ACTED IN GOOD FAITH. NOR WOULD IT BE CONVINCING, OR EVEN WISE FOR THE USG TO EVEN INDIRECTLY CONTRADICT PRESIDENT ODUBER UNLESS THE STATEMENT IS FROM A SUFFICIENTLY HIGH LEVEL U.S. OFFICIAL TO ASSURE ITS CREDIBILITY.

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2. REGARDING ODUBER'S MOTIVES IN TAKING THE POSITION
THAT THE EXTRADITION ATTEMPT WAS PURELY A MANIFESTATION
OF U.S.

INTERNAL POLITICS, WE TEND TO THE BELIEF THAT
THE PUBLIC AND POLITICAL SENTIMENT AGAINST VESCO HAS
NOW BUILT UP SUFFICIENTLY TO MOVE ODUBER TO TRY TO
SHIFT THE BLAME FOR VESCO'S PRESENCE FROM HIS
GOVERNMENT AND FIGUERES BACK TO THE U.S. THIS INTER-
PRETATION ASSUMES THAT ODUBER KNOWS FULL WELL THAT THE
USG MADE A LEGITIMATE TRY TO EXTRADITE VESCO.
ON THE OTHER HAND, ODUBER MAY HAVE COME TO BELIEVE
GENUINELY THAT THE USG'S EXTRADITION ATTEMPT WAS
DESIGNED TO FAIL. HE HAS SUGGESTED THIS SEVERAL
TIMES PRIVATELY, AND ONCE IN HIS LETTER TO VESCO DELIVERED
IMMEDIATELY BEFORE HE TOOK OFFICE. EITHER HYPOTHESIS IS
PLAUSIBLE, GIVEN THE FACTS OF THE DEEP VESCO INVOLVEMENT
IN THIS COUNTRY'S POLITICS. HOWEVER, NOTING
PRESIDENT ODUBER'S PROVEN RELUCTANCE TO BUCK
EX-PRESIDENT FIGUERES, HIS FULL UNDERSTANDING
OF THE USG'S INTEREST IN VESCO GAINED FROM
BRIEFINGS AND DOCUMENTS, HIS GROWING PROBLEM
WITH PUBLIC OPINION OVER THE ISSUE, AND HIS
PERSONAL INCLINATION TO TRY TO SIDESTEP
UNCOMFORTABLE SITUATIONS, WE TEND TO BELIEVE
THE PRESIDENT IS TRYING TO SHIFT THE BLAME.

3. WHETHER OR NOT DEPARTMENT DECIDES THAT US SHOULD
MAKE PUBLIC STATEMENT, WE BELIEVE THAT CHARGE
SHOULD ATTEMPT SEE ODUBER VERY SOON TO SET THE RECORD
STRAIGHT. REQUEST INSTRUCTIONS AND GUIDANCE ON THIS
PRESENTATION.

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